

BUR919990197US1

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please cancel claims 1, 2, 9, 10, 15-18, 24, 25 and 31.

Please amend claims 3-6, 8, 11, 12, 14, 19-21, 26, 28, 30 and 32, as follows:

Sub E
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3. (Amended) A method for etching a semiconductor substrate using a germanium hard mask, the semiconductor substrate having a dielectric layer over a major surface thereof, the method comprising the steps of:

- a) depositing a layer of metallic germanium over the dielectric layer;
- b) patterning the layer of metallic germanium to form the germanium hard mask as a top most layer over the dielectric layer, the step further comprising:
 - i) depositing a photo resist layer over the layer of metallic germanium;
 - ii) exposing and developing the photo resist layer to form a photolithography image;
 - iii) etching the layer of metallic germanium through the photolithography image; and
 - iv) removing the photoresist layer prior to selectively etching the dielectric layer through the germanium hard mask;
- c) selectively etching the dielectric layer through the germanium hard mask with the germanium hard mask as a top most layer to form an opening in the dielectric layer; and

09/599,783

2

BUR919990197US1

Sub E1 Cont
d) selectively etching the semiconductor substrate through the opening in the dielectric layer, and

further comprising the step of stripping away the layer of metallic germanium after performing the step of selectively etching the dielectric layer, the step of stripping away the layer of metallic germanium including the steps of:

oxidizing the layer of metallic germanium to form a layer of germanium oxide therefrom; and
removing the layer of germanium oxide.

10/ and
4. (Amended) The method as claimed in claim 3, the step of removing the layer of germanium oxide including rinsing the semiconductor substrate in water.

5. (Amended) The method as claimed in claim 3, the step of stripping away the layer of metallic germanium including stripping away the layer of metallic germanium before performing the step of selectively etching the semiconductor substrate.

6. (Amended) The method as claimed in claim 3, the step of depositing a layer of metallic germanium including depositing the layer of metallic germanium having a thickness between approximately 40 nm and approximately 500 nm.

Sub E2
8. (Amended) The method as claimed in claim 3, the step of forming a dielectric layer further including the steps of:

forming a pad oxide layer having a thickness between approximately 5 nm and approximately 30 nm over the major surface of the semiconductor substrate;

09/599,783

BUR919990197US1

D2
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Sub
E2
cont.

depositing a nitride layer having a thickness between 50 nm and approximately 300 nm over the pad oxide layer; and

depositing a mask oxide layer having a thickness between 800 nm and approximately 3,000 nm over the nitride layer.

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E3

11. (Amended) [The] A method for fabricating a semiconductor device having a dielectric stack over a major surface thereof, comprising the steps of:

- a) depositing a metallic germanium layer over the dielectric stack;
- b) patterning the metallic germanium layer to form a germanium hard mask as a top most layer over the dielectric stack, the step further comprising:
- i) depositing a photo resist layer over the metallic germanium layer;
 - ii) exposing and developing the photo resist layer to form a photolithography image; and
 - iii) etching the metallic germanium layer through the photolithography image;
- c) removing the photoresist layer prior to selectively etching the dielectric layer through the germanium hard mask;
- d) etching the dielectric stack through the germanium hard mask with the germanium hard mask as a top most layer to form a dielectric hard mask over the major surface of the semiconductor substrate;
- e) etching the semiconductor substrate through the dielectric hard mask;
- f) forming doped regions in the semiconductor substrate; and

09/599,783

BUR919990197US1

Sub E3 cont.
103 cont.
g) forming dielectric and conductive structures over the semiconductor substrate; and further comprising the step of stripping away the metallic germanium layer after the step of etching the dielectric stack and before the step of etching the semiconductor substrate, wherein the step of stripping away the metallic germanium layer includes the steps of:
oxidizing the metallic germanium layer; and
rinsing the semiconductor substrate in water.

12. (Amended) The method as claimed in claim 11, wherein the step of depositing a metallic germanium layer includes depositing the metallic germanium layer having a thickness between approximately 40 nm and approximately 500 nm in a chemical vapor deposition process.

Sub E4
14. (Amended) The method as claimed in claim 11, wherein the step of forming a dielectric stack further includes the steps of:
forming a pad oxide layer having a thickness between approximately 5 nm and approximately 30 nm on the major surface of the semiconductor substrate;
depositing a nitride layer having a thickness between 50 nm and approximately 300 nm on the pad oxide layer; and
depositing a mask oxide layer having a thickness between 800 nm and approximately 3000 nm on the nitride layer.

Sub E5
19. (Amended) A method for etching a semiconductor wafer, the semiconductor wafer having a dielectric stack over a major surface thereof, the method comprising the steps of:

09/599,783

BUR919990197US1

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- a) forming a germanium hard mask as a top most layer over the dielectric stack, the step comprising depositing a photo resist layer over the metallic germanium layer;
- b) removing the photoresist layer prior to selectively etching the dielectric layer through the germanium hard mask;
- c) etching the dielectric stack through the germanium hard mask to form a dielectric hard mask over the major surface of the semiconductor wafer; and
- d) etching the semiconductor wafer through the dielectric hard mask; and
- wherein the step of forming a germanium hard mask includes the steps of:

depositing a layer of metallic germanium having a thickness equal to or greater than approximately 40nm over the dielectric stack;

patterning the layer of metallic germanium to form the germanium hard mask, and which further includes the steps of:

- depositing a photo resist layer over the layer of metallic germanium;
- patterning the photo resist layer to form a photolithography mask; and
- etching the layer of metallic germanium through the photolithography mask; and
- further comprising the step of stripping away the germanium hard mask after etching the dielectric stack and before etching the semiconductor wafer,
- wherein the step of stripping away the germanium hard mask includes the steps of:

oxidizing the layer of metallic germanium to convert the layer of metallic germanium into a layer of germanium oxide; and

D5
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BUR919990197US1

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removing the layer of germanium oxide.

20. (Amended) The method as claimed in claim 19, wherein the step of removing the layer of germanium oxide includes rinsing the semiconductor wafer in water.

21. (Amended) The method as claimed in claim 3, wherein the step of patterning the layer of metallic germanium comprises:

depositing a layer of photo resist;

etching the metallic germanium layer through the layer of photo resist; and

removing the layer of photo resist prior to the step of selectively etching the dielectric layer through the germanium hard mask.

26. (Amended) A method for etching a semiconductor substrate having a dielectric layer over a major surface thereof, the method comprising the steps of:

a) depositing a layer of germanium over the dielectric layer;

b) depositing a photoresist layer over the germanium layer;

c) exposing and developing the photo resist layer to form a photolithography image;

d) etching the metallic germanium layer through the photolithography image to form a germanium hard mask over the dielectric layer;

e) removing the photoresist layer from over the germanium hard mask;

f) patterning the dielectric layer through the germanium hard a mask after removing the photoresist layer from over the germanium hard mask to form a dielectric hard mask over the semiconductor substrate, and

09/599,783

7

BUR919990197US1

D⁷ cont.

g) selectively etching the semiconductor substrate through the dielectric hard mask; and further comprising the step of stripping away the germanium hard mask after patterning the dielectric layer to form the dielectric hard mask, wherein stripping away the layer of germanium comprises:

oxidizing the layer of germanium to form a layer of germanium oxide therefrom; and removing the layer of germanium oxide.

Sub E⁷

28. (Amended) The method as claimed in claim 26, wherein depositing a layer of germanium comprises depositing the layer of germanium having a thickness between approximately 40 nm and approximately 500 nm.

Sub E⁷

30. (Amended) The method as claimed in claim 26, further comprising forming a dielectric layer by:

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forming a pad oxide layer having a thickness between approximately 5 nm and approximately 30 nm over the major surface of the semiconductor substrate;

depositing a nitride layer having a thickness between 50 nm and approximately 300 nm over the pad oxide layer; and

depositing a mask oxide layer having a thickness between 800 nm and approximately 3,000 nm over the nitride layer.

Sub E⁷

32. (Amended) A method for etching a semiconductor substrate having a dielectric layer over a major surface thereof, the method comprising the steps of:

a) depositing a layer of germanium over the dielectric layer;

09/599,783